Power of Thought

SWAMI PARAMANANDA

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BY

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What a man thinks that he is: this is the old secret. The mind, it is said, is of two kinds, pure and impure; impure from the contact with lust, pure when free from lust. Mind alone is the cause of bondage and liberty for men; if attached to the world, it becomes bound; if free from the world, that is liberty.

Maitrayana-Brahmana-Upanishad.

If a man's thoughts are not dissipated, if his mind is not perplexed, then there is no fear for him while he is watchful. Not a mother, not a father, will do so much, nor any other relatives; a well-directed mind will do us greater service. Let the wise man guard his thoughts, for they are difficult to perceive, very artful, and they rush wherever they list: thoughts well guarded bring happiness. As the champion warrior relies for victory upon his armor's strength, so right thought is like a strong cuirass able to withstand the six sense robbers.

Buddha.

Wheresoever the restless and unsteady mind may wander away, let him withdraw it from there and bring it under the control of the Self alone. He whose passions are quieted and mind perfectly tranquil, who has become one with Brahman (the Supreme), being freed from all impurities, to such a Yogi comes supreme bliss. Thus constantly holding the mind steadfast, the Yogi, whose sins are shaken off, easily attains the infinite bliss, born of contact with Brahman.

Bhagavad-Gita.

POWER OF THOUGHT

Nothing is more potent to mould human life than thought. It is the motive power which drives this machine of body, mind and senses; but its activity is not limited to the physical organism or to immediate surroundings. It encircles vaster regions, outstripping the lightning in swiftness. All mortals possess this power intrinsically. Though its outer manifestation may vary in different individuals, yet it is equally latent in every living creature. The variations which exist arise from the differences in the development of the mind, which is its conveying medium. According to the capacity of the me-

dium is this inner power manifested. As the one sun appears of varying strength when it shines through clear or clouded glass, so the power of thought through some minds shines more effulgently than through others.

The use or abuse of this force determines the destiny of man. When the thought is properly controlled and directed, it lifts him ever higher and higher; when it is ill-directed and uncontrolled, it drags him down and bars his growth, for verily man is what he thinks. Our whole life is nothing but the outer manifestation of our inner thought. Whether this is conscious or unconscious, it is always a creative force, a seed which sooner or later will bear fruit as good or evil action. If our mind dwells on things which are trivial and unwholesome, very soon we find that our whole nature is being colored by them. Similarly, when our mind is fixed on lofty ideas,

our nature is inevitably uplifted and transformed.

All activity is preceded by thought. First we think, then we act; therefore it is impossible for any one to refrain from mistakes or evil deeds without paying proper heed to his thoughts. The thought must first be correct before we can act wisely. Buddha says: "If you remove (from conduct) the purpose of the mind, the bodily act is but as rotten wood; wherefore, regulate the mind, and then the body will spontaneously go right." There are very few people who think consciously. An impulse comes, a desire awakens in the heart, and at once the whole thought is carried away by it; it takes possession of the mind, as if the man had sold himself to it. In the Gita we read: When a man's mind constantly dwells on sense-objects, he begins to value them and becomes attached to them. From this attachment arises the desire to possess them, and if anything stands in his way,

he grows angry. Through anger he loses all control and power of discernment, and thus he works his own ruin. At first the object and he stand as two separate entities; but through attachment and lack of discrimination, he becomes identified with it and naturally suffers from whatever effect it may produce.

When, however, the mind is controlled and discriminative, one can avoid such dangers. Suppose someone speaks harshly to you, can it really hurt you? No; it is you who give it importance through your own thought. If you analyze, you will find that you are hurt on account of your own mental attitude; and it is that which shatters your strength and brings suffering. Without a properly controlled mind and the habit of right thinking, therefore, no one can safely travel along the path of life. Even our ordinary duties cannot be performed without right thinking; and

right thinking means the awakening of intuition, the establishing of tranquillity in our whole being, cultivating strength of mind. This is what we need in order to think properly. Ordinary minds think, but their thoughts are broken before they have achieved the object of their thought; therefore they cannot attain their purpose. However small or great the object to be gained, unless the mind is a thinking mind it cannot accomplish anything. No matter what we do, no matter how insignificant our position may be, whether many depend on us or few, we have a certain responsiblity in life. To meet this ably, we must learn to live understandingly; and we cannot acquire understanding without bringing our thoughts under our control, making the mind introspective; in other words, without gaining the power of concentrated thought.

The chief aim of all religion and philosophy is

to lift the mind to a state of perfect balance, serenity and vigor. In order to do this, concentration is essential; hence practical religion always leads to contemplation. We must think diligently and learn to adjust our forces. We must find out what are our needs and defects; what are the causes of our mental disturbances and distractions. We can discover these things only when we look within; so we must become meditative, for going within ourselves is what meditation means. When we think constantly of objects in the external universe, that too is a kind of meditation, since our thoughts flow steadily in that direction; but this dissipates our strength. When, however, our mind is focused and turned inward, when it is well established on the higher problems of life, then it may be called truly meditative; and through such thought we gain real wisdom and happiness.

Meditation is the key to knowledge, the source of all power. Even those who seek knowledge on the material plane,—scientists, discoverers, inventors, must develop a certain habit of meditation. If they do not have great concentration, if they do not plunge heart and soul into their research, they cannot discern anything. In the same way, when we wish to discover the subtler facts of the spiritual plane, we must gather up all our forces and turn them within; then alone can we understand. Man must know. Merely believing in some theory, in some doctrine or dogma is not enough for the intelligent mind. A wakeful mind cannot be satisfied by simply hearing about things from others. Therefore Vedanta declares that religion is a matter of perception, of actual realization or individual experience. This power of realization is not confined to a few great ones only. It is the birth-

right of every living being. We all have the power to centralize our energies and realize the same Truth. If we will only try to awaken our inner nature and strive with perseverance, determination and real power of will, nothing can stand in our way.

Through the meditative habit we gain intuition. Things which once seemed impossible grow possible to us, when we learn to turn our eyes inward and see for ourselves. All the mighty truths proclaimed by the great Seers, we too can perceive and prove them, if we follow in their footsteps and lead the same kind of life. Self-control, the mastering of our lower nature, the acquisition of direct knowledge: these are not mere theories. They can be achieved. We know that there are people born with superior power, superior understanding, greater control than others. What makes the difference? It is the

wakeful nature of their mind which enables them to acquire these. We all have the same possibilities, however. We can either become weak by letting our mind be scattered and filled with selfish desires, or we can become great mentally and spiritually by focusing all our energies on higher ideals.

It is said in the Scriptures: "Mind alone is the cause of the bondage and of the liberation of mankind." The impure mind binds man, the purified mind frees him. Mind is impure when it is divided and lacking in discrimination. It is pure and clean when it is single; for purity means singleness, something that is unmixed. The tendency of the undisciplined mind is to be divided and scattered. Most people never try to control their thought; they do not seem to realize that following it helplessly, letting it wander hither and thither unchecked, means a

tremendous waste of energy. The scattered state of mind, indeed, is the greatest drawback in all human endeavor. We may have every advantage in our outer life, but if we are lacking in purity or singleness of mind, we can make little use of our opportunities. Most of our sorrow, suffering, sickness and failure are due to a divided mind. Until we can gain command over our scattered forces, we can achieve very little on any plane. In fact, we cannot perform the simplest task ably unless we have a certain amount of concentration in our thought. The unconcentrated mind is bound to be visionary and unstable. It cannot see the present clearly, it has no power of foresight with regard to the future, and it cannot retain the experiences of the past. Experience is the basis of all knowledge; and only when we can retain what we have learned through experience, can we progress. Yet

how few really remember the lessons they have gained from their past experiences, so that they can recall them and not commit the same blunder over and over. This is because their mind is so fickle, so unstable that they cannot carry any line of thought to a conclusion. Continuity of thought is necessary to attain success in any undertaking and continuity comes only through the power of concentration.

There can be no peace or rest for us until our mind is well collected and focused. Often we see a person who is tired and wants to rest, but even though he may be lying on a soft bed, yet he finds no rest. Why? Because his forces are so scattered, his thought is so distracted, that he cannot quiet his mind, even though his body is free from activity. There are some who have the notion that resting means doing absolutely nothing—that if the mind is restless, to quiet it we must

give up all thought. But we cannot give up thinking. The mind will always go on thinking something; only there are certain thoughts which are restful and certain thoughts which bring unrest. When our mind is directed towards elevating objects, then it will grow calm, serene and strong. But this is only possible through constant mental discipline. When we first try to focus our thoughts, we find how dissipated they are. This state, however, is nothing but the result of our own unconscious habits of thinking. Therefore, to surmount these, we must cultivate counter-habits; for all thinking is a matter of habit. At first it may be very difficult, because all our past habits rise and try to overthrow the mind; but through constant determined effort and discrimination we can conquer. For instance, one who has been accustomed to many forms of distraction, like reading light novels, finds it very diffi-

cult to hold the mind on serious subjects. Yet by persisting, he begins to cultivate a taste for them and finds the same satisfaction in these that he once found in his previous habits.

This shows that what we call the natural trend of mind is nothing but a habit which we ourselves have formed. Therefore the most weak and degraded human being can become strong and noble through the power of well-directed thought. The same force which once dragged him down, now becomes the means of his regeneration. By right thinking a man can free himself from bondage, disease, imperfection; and through wrong thinking he can create fetters for himself. By constantly thinking that you are pure, that you are a child of God, you become so. And this is one of the great lessons which have been given to the world by the Teachers of India. From time immemorial these sages have

declared that if a man desires to be liberated from bondage, the power of right thought must be awakened in him. Let a man feel hopeful, for he has something which is mighty within. Let him not think that he is weak or a sinner. If he has committed blunders out of weakness or ignorance, it can never help him to dwell on them. Even if he has done something wrong in his life, it would be better for him to forget it and start afresh. That is the only way he can counteract his defects and go onward. Let him have an ideal on which to focus his thought; then, when he has learned to concentrate all his forces on that, he will very soon rise above his present weakness; for all weakness is the result of dissipation and misuse of energy.

There are four kinds of help which we can render our fellow-beings. We may give food, clothes or money to a needy man, but his need

returns. Next we may offer secular education. Education opens a man's eyes and teaches him to take care of himself; so to give him knowledge, even secular knowledge, is a great thing. The third form of help is to save a man's life. This may seem the greatest, but death may seize him again at any moment. The fourth and highest help is to teach a man how to control and direct his thought properly, that he may gain understanding or wisdom, for this will save his soul. The first three forms of help are unquestionably very good; but the only permanent help is to give people the mastery over all their powers, since they can then stand on their own feet and work out their own salvation.

The secret of success, health, and happiness lies in the power of concentration; and nowhere is this need felt more keenly than in the Western world to-day. What is the cause of the many

nervous disorders to be found among people? Is it because they work too much? No, it is not the amount of their work. It is the misdirection of their energies. It is the lack of proper control over mind and body which at present is killing everyone little by little. Work of itself will not exhaust us, will not make us restless and unhealthy. It is misdirected activity. We do not know how to use our activities properly, how to protect ourselves from our own undisciplined thoughts. What we need is not so much to lessen our activity, as to gain the habit of control over our mind and through our mind over all our forces.

This, however, cannot be accomplished in a day or by chance. Nor can it be given by another. It can be acquired only by ourselves through regular practice. In the Gita when Arjuna, the disciple, says: "This wisdom which has been de-

clared by Thee as even-mindedness, I do not see the possibility of its lasting existence because of the restlessness of the mind"; the Lord replies: "It is true that the mind is restless and difficult to control, yet through constant practice and dispassion it can be subdued. But this wisdom is undoubtedly difficult to attain by one of uncontrolled nature." Therefore, if you wish to gain control over your mind, you must take up some regular practice. The first thing you must learn is to sit quietly; for until you can restrain your physical activities and hold your body still, you cannot gain mental poise. Nothing will more quickly cure nervousness and benefit the health than the daily exercise of sitting still and checking all unnecessary and unconscious movements of the body. When you have succeeded in doing this, the mind will naturally grow calmer. Then you must take some Ideal on which to fix your

thoughts. At first the main practice will be to drive out from the mind the many other thoughts that crowd into it; but by persistent effort the number of these will gradually decrease and the mind will become stronger, steadier and purer. Even a few moments spent in this way each day will clarify the mind, strengthen the will and enable you to do your duty with ever-growing efficiency and wisdom.

Our thought is such a mighty factor in our daily living, that one single thought in the morning can fill our whole day either with sunshine and joy or with gloom and depression. All our power and all our weakness come from this one source. Each one of us creates a world of his own, which is but a reflection of his thought. It is our own mental attitude which inspires love or hatred in those whom we meet. Every thought of love sent out by us is sure to awaken

a thought of love in response; so too with every unloving thought. Each one of our little thoughts also unites us with the great cosmic currents of thought, intensifying our individual state of mind. All the results we attain are according to our thoughts. It is the thought which determines the true value of every act. Sri Ramakrishna shows this in His parable of two friends. One day they were strolling about together when they passed a place where a religious service was going on. One of them said: "Come, let us stop here for a while and listen to the holy words which are being spoken." The other refused, saying: "No, what is the use of listening to the Bhagavatam? Let us spend the time in yonder public hall where we shall have some recreation and pleasure." The first one, unwilling to do this, stayed to hear the Bhagavatam; while the other went to the place of amusement. But all the

time he was there, he kept thinking to himself: "Alas! why have I come here? How much happier my friend must be, listening to the sacred words of the Lord." Thus, although in a public hall, his thoughts were fixed on God; while the other, who was listening to the Bhagavatam, found no joy in it, but kept regretting that he had not gone with his friend. His thought remained constantly on the pleasure he was missing, so he reaped the fruit of worldly thought; while his friend gained all the merit of holy thought.

This shows that our outer actions cannot be fruitful unless our thought is in accord with them. That is why many of our apparently good undertakings do not bring the desired results; it is because our heart and hand do not work together. Without harmony between body and mind we cannot achieve any great end, either physically or mentally. When, on the contrary,

all our forces are united, so great is our power, that, if we fix our thought on anything, it is sure to come to us. Hence we must consider carefully whether what we are thinking of we shall want when it comes. This is the reason why we should practise discrimination at every step. But not only for our own sake, for the sake of others as well we should guard our thought carefully, because it is influencing directly or indirectly all those with whom we associate. We may refuse to acknowledge this, saying: "I have no responsibility for any one else"; but no one can come in contact with us without being affected by our state of mind. It may not be intentional on our part, but our every thought, conscious or unconscious, is radiating a good or evil influence and creating an atmosphere which everyone must feel.

It is not enough, however, merely to discover this power within us; we must also find out what

it is, whence it is, whose it is. Unless we understand this, we cannot use it intelligently. So long as it is in the hands of one who is limited and ignorant, it is a danger; for infinite power in finite hands is always dangerous. We must trace it to its source. We must realize that our little mind is an actual part of a great universal mind, the thought which impels and shapes our life is in reality one with a mighty current of cosmic thought. We may use it independently and to small ends, to gain health, mental power or success. But only when it is united with the Supreme; when our mind constantly rests in Him; when we are conscious of His presence in all our thoughts, in all our acts, in all our life; when our whole heart, soul and body become instruments in His hands; only then do we gain possession of this power in its full measure. Therefore let a man ever remain connected by his thought with the pure Essence of his being.

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